

Politics of the Heart

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has studied for the past twelve years in both the Zen and Theravada traditions, with Mahasi Sayadaw, Taungpulu Sayadaw and Joshi Sasaki Roshi. She leads Vipassana retreats around the world, and until last October was a Dharma Teacher at Insight Meditation Society, Barre, MA, from which she resigned. In deciding to no longer represent the Theravada tradition, her strongest reason was "the non-recognition of the equality of women" within that tradition. She now teaches on her own and is currently writing a book. In March of this year she married Allan Mandell and moved to Austin, Texas.

It's a pleasure for me to be here, and I'm actually here as a woman. There are teachings and experiences transmitted thru the Buddhist tradition that there's "no man and there's no woman." Thus, saying that "I'm a woman in the Buddhist tradition" is a bit "unkosher." Yet, it seems that now is a time when we actually can break down a lot of barriers which have inhibited us from looking at ourselves as women and as men.

When I first knew of the Women's Movement years ago, I wasn't interested. I chose not to involve myself in that movement even though I agreed with many of the ideals. I chose to follow the Buddhist path because it was the form of practice that I wanted.

Your invitation last year to speak here at the Providence Zen Center was one that sparked my inquiry into myself as a Woman-Buddhist teacher. It was my first time speaking at a women's conference. Upon reflection, I realized that as a teacher of Buddhism I represented a patriarchal form which held negative images about women. It was hard for me to come to terms with this because of what had been given to me by my teachers. They had given me guidance in a most open and generous way. I received the training openly along with my authorization to continue the delivery of these teachings. So my own step forward, which included my resignation from the Theravada Tradition, came out of a "morality of responsibility."

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I could no longer stand before women and say that I represent a tradition which does not recognize a woman as an equal being. In the Theravada tradition, women are said to be a lesser birth. When women were accepted as nuns, Bhikkunis, they were asked to take eight rules which would make them subservient to men. These rules included: even a nun of the highest order had to bow down to a monk of one day; all nuns had to bow to monks, monks not to nuns; a monk may reprimand a nun, a nun may not reprimand a monk. And so forth.

There are traditions, not just Buddhist traditions but other religious, political-social systems which call themselves the "Truth". Yet within the embodiment of what they call the Truth, there are very political statements about men and about women.

It's possible to look at being a woman in a very new way. Many of the women leaders of the past were still under patriarchal obligations and patriarchal domination. It still may be that women leaders represent the patriarchy and have patriarchal conditioning. We see it in the business world, in the social and political world. Now we have women leaders going forth on their own without patriarchal constraints. This is very special. However, can women look at themselves as women? This is one of the challenges of our times.

There's a story in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* about a woman who made a decision to scorch her face in order to enter zen practice. She was not accepted for zen

practice because she was too beautiful. This was "her problem". It was said that she would have distracted the monks from their practice. There's an article in the journal *Women and Religion*, called "An Image of Women in Old Buddhist Literature: The Daughters of Mara." In this article the Feminine is implicated as one of the last temptations of the Buddha. As he sat under the tree, Mara showed him images of beautiful dancing "ladies" to lure him away from enlightenment. Within Buddhist traditions men and women have been separated, especially in celibate kinds of settings. One way of coping with these situations was to cast women in negative or problematic roles.

We must examine all of these images. This examining can take the form of a naming. It's not a naming to be held onto, but it's a naming to identify. In the latest book by Gloria Steinem, she talks about how there was never a name for "wife battering," it was just called Life! But now that there's a name there is more possibility of investigation and of solution. Don't be afraid to name or to identify. Learn to work with that. Certainly all of the traditions teach the nature of emptiness. We can also bring that wisdom into our noticing and naming. We can say for example, "Yes, there is wife battering"; "Yes there are negative images of women in Buddhist texts." "There are also some positive images." Looking at images and situations directly and naming them allows us to see them clearly.

I've heard too many distressing stories this year. Some of these have been published. Other stories I've heard directly from individuals. They included deep depressions of women students who were approached sexually by their teachers. The students did not know how to deal with this type of behavior. They had no context in their spiritual communities in which they could relate these kinds of experiences. At first there was little, if no communication about these experiences. The most distressing story I heard was of a suicide. A

woman had an affair with her teacher. Then, he left her and moved on to another place. This was too confusing for her.

Many of you have an enormous amount of life wisdom. You have seen a lot and have tried many things. You have tried to work on your problems and on your lives in many ways and you have come to spiritual practice. Then some of you, even with the life wisdom, turn away from looking at the current community problems, even to the extent of saying, "We don't have those problems here." Perhaps you think, "I just want to surrender, I don't want to think about that anymore." Here surrender is used as avoidance. A lot of you come here thinking, "That's not what I'm dealing with; I'm just dealing with meditation practice." And yet, we also have to remember our own maturity and adulthood.

There are certain phraseologies of becoming "Children of the Dharma," of having "child-like minds." This does not mean acting like a child. Some of you may not be able to look at these situations because of dependency. This could be dependency on the teacher or on the institution. This dependency needs to be looked at. I know this is a difficult investigation.

For myself, one step in assuming the investigation and the integrity of being a woman was to read many books by and about women. These books became a link to my intuitive and experiential understanding. I began my reading with women in



Photo by Sonia Alexander

50 RECOMMENDED BOOKS

compiled by Jacqueline Schwartz Mandell

OF WOMAN BORN
Adrien Rich

OUT ON A LIMB
Shirley MacLaine

THE ASSERTIVE WOMAN
Stanlee Phelps & Nancy Austin

WOMAN OF THE CELTS
Jean Markale

SEXIST RELIGION & WOMEN IN THE CHURCH
Alice Hageman

CHANGING OF THE GODS
Naomi Goldenberg

THE POLITICS OF REALITY
Marilyn Frye

WOMAN AND NATURE
Susan Griffin

THE GREAT MOTHER
Erich Newman

JUDAISM AND THE NEW WOMAN
Sally Priesand

IN A DIFFERENT VOICE
Carol Gilligan

WHEN GOD WAS A WOMAN
Marlin Stone

TOWARD A NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF WOMAN
Jean Baker Miller

WHY THE GREEN NIGGER?
Elizabeth Dodson Gray

DIVING DEEP AND SURFACING
Carol Christ

LESBIAN/WOMAN
Del Martin & Phyllis Lyon

THE CINDERELLA COMPLEX
Colette Dowling

THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE AND THE NATURE OF THE DIVINE
Judith Ochsorn

WOMEN AND RELIGION (Revised Ed.)
Ed. Judith Plaskow

GOD AND THE RHETORIC OF SEXUALITY
Phyllis Trible

LILITH
(Jewish Women's Newsletter)

WOMEN OF SPIRIT
Eds. R. Ruether & E. McLaughlin

THE MISTS OF AVALON
Marion Zimmer Bradley

BEYOND GOD THE FATHER
Mary Daly

KNOWING WOMAN
Irene Claremont de Castilleja

DIARY OF ANAIS NIN (4 volumes)
Anais Nin

WOMEN IN BUDDHISM
Diana Paul

WOMEN UNDER PRIMITIVE BUDDHISM
I.B. Horner

LISTENING TO OUR BODIES
Stephanie Demetrakopolous

WOMEN SPIRIT RISING
Eds. Carol Christ & Judith Plaskow

RELIGION AND SEXISM
Ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether

PATRIARCHY AS A CONCEPTUAL TRAP
Elizabeth Dodson Gray

FROM HOUSEWIFE TO HERETIC
Sonia Johnson

JOURNEY INTO BURMESE SILENCE
Marie Byles

PSALMS OF THE SISTERS
Rhys Davids

THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY
Ed. Charlene Spretnak

FEMININE PSYCHOLOGY
Karen Horney

WOMEN, MEN, & THE PSYCHOLOGY OF POWER
Hilary M. Lips

UNSPOKEN WORLDS
Rita Gross

BEYOND MERE OBEDIENCE
Dorothea Solle

AGAINST OUR WILL
Susan Brownmiller

WOMEN AND WORLD RELIGIONS
Denise Lardner Carmody

SUFFERING
Dorothea Solle

WOMEN'S REALITY
Ann Wilson Schaeb

THE MANAGERIAL WOMAN
Margaret Henning & Anne Jardin

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE CORPORATION
Rosabeth Moss Kantner

BEYOND ANDROCENTRISM
Ed. Rita Gross

OUTRAGEOUS ACTS & EVERYDAY REBELLION
Gloria Steinem

THE COLOR PURPLE
Alice Walker

DAUGHTERS OF COPPER WOMAN

WHAT DO WOMEN WANT
Luise Eichenbaum & Susie Orbach

KAHAWAI—JOURNAL OF WOMEN AND BUDDHISM

Christianity and then with women in Judaism. They have looked at discrimination against women in religious institutions. I found a lot of information which related to what I was looking at. Then I went on to read books about women and patriarchy.

We are presented with all kinds of imagery from patriarchal religions. We may not know how great our conditioning is. There are patriarchal images of both men and women. In the Theravada tradition, Buddhahood, the highest

attainment of Buddhism, is not allowable for a woman. This might be the most discriminatory statement there is within that tradition.

Today one may actually be fulfilled in every way, as a woman or a man, not just a non-gender being. This includes fulfillment in your own spiritual practice to the highest degree. I am currently writing a book about women and spirituality. I want to share and to deepen this kind of inquiry which is so important for anyone interested in a clear perception of their spiritual growth. □